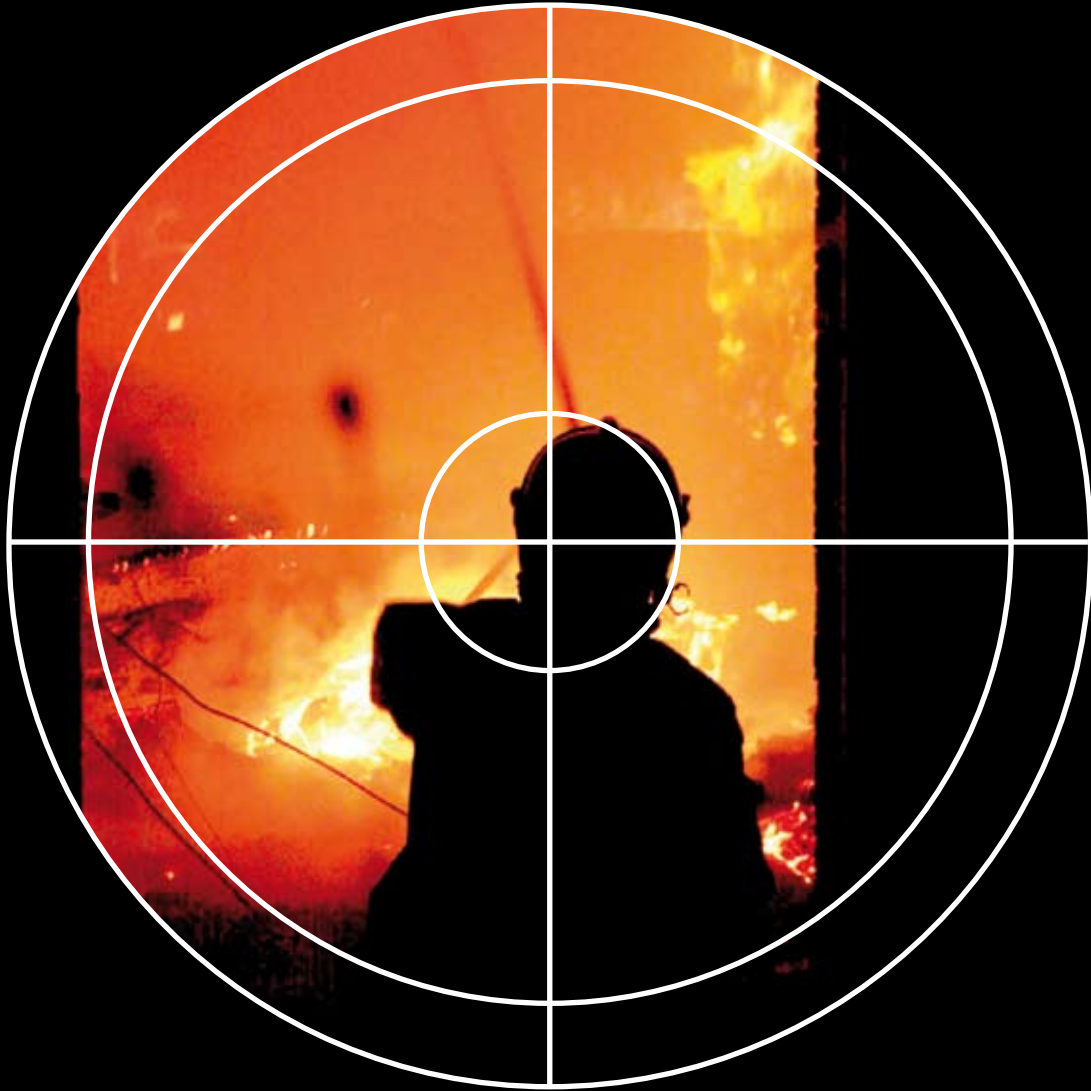


FireFighter

The magazine of the Fire Brigades Union www.fbu.org.uk

March 2008



EASY TARGET?

Attacks on firefighters are still unacceptably high, finds new research commissioned by the FBU **See p10**



Breakthrough in Scotland as battle continues in Westminster **See p 14**



Warwickshire

Improvement notice served **See p 7**

John Noble

We remember

See p 4



Another tragedy



I begin these comments on a tragically far too familiar note. January saw the death of John Noble in an accident

whilst attending an emergency call. John was a Watch Manager at Alloa Fire Station, Central Scotland. Our thoughts are with his family and work colleagues at this difficult time. It was clear from the tributes made at John's funeral that he was a much-loved husband and father and a good friend and colleague to many in the fire service as well as in the wider community. I know that local officials are doing whatever they can to be of assistance.

Pensions

As we go to press there appears to be good news from Scotland, with the Scottish Government indicating it wishes to move swiftly to resolve the issue of ill-health pensions for Scottish firefighters – a development that only underlines the need for decisive action from Westminster.

Meanwhile, the working group proposed by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) to consider the issue of ill-health pensions and the concerns raised by the FBU. It offers the possibility of progress on this key issue. Whether it delivers progress remains to be seen. It seems that support for the current arrangements (which will effectively eliminate the right to ill-health pensions) is limited to a few civil servants.

The stance of ministers is still

not entirely clear despite some positive comments made in the Westminster Parliament by Parmjit Dhanda.

As far as the Union is concerned, the only thing this working group should be doing is quickly withdrawing the offending guidance and ending this disgraceful situation facing FBU members. In the meantime I encourage all members to continue to lobby MPs on this crucial issue.

Attacks on firefighters

Over the past three years the FBU has been the only organisation in the fire service to highlight the disgraceful attacks on fire crews, the only organisation to commission research in order to quantify a problem vastly underestimated by the scandalous official figures and the only organisation to identify ways to tackle it based on the views of frontline crews.

But the government needs to take a lead on this problem rather than sitting on the sidelines ignoring it. There needs to be a government-led national strategy backed up by long-term funding and an expansion of our community engagement programmes.

Pay – in the fire service and elsewhere

You will be aware that following the agreement of last year's pay rise – which was in line with the pay formula agreed in 2003 – the National Joint Council established a joint working party to consider pay for the future. This working party has now commenced its work.

You will also be aware from government announcements



that public sector pay is facing a major squeeze over the next three years. The central argument that has been used by Government to justify this is that it is essential to maintain the 'fight against inflation'.

But there is no evidence that public sector pay has a major influence on the general level of inflation. This is an attempt by Government to make public sector workers pay for growing instability in the economy. When we compare the squeeze on public sector pay with the

huge bonuses handed out in the City each year, it is clear that double standards are at work.

City bonuses over the past ten years have certainly had an impact on inflation in certain key areas of the economy such as housing. One result is that in many young people (firefighters included) face an ever-growing mountain to climb to try to find somewhere decent and affordable to live. Yet the growing inequality which lies behind all this is never challenged by New Labour.

YOUR LETTERS

Thank you

The funeral of John Noble in Alloa on 1 February

JAMES HENSBY PHOTOGRAPHY



It is truly sickening when the wealthy are encouraged to grab as much as they can while those performing essential public services on behalf of the whole of society are told to tighten their belts.

The truth is that to get decent and effective public services requires investment, especially investment in the people who deliver the service on the ground – the workforce. Attacking and demoralising public servants is a recipe for failure.

Matt Wrack

On behalf of all members within Warwickshire Fire and Rescue service I would like to convey our appreciation to all those who have supported us through these difficult times.

Following the memorial service at Coventry Cathedral on Friday 25 January, it left everybody in no doubt that the unity within the Fire Service is as strong as ever.

May I take this opportunity to pass on our heartfelt appreciation to the USAR teams involved at the incident at Atherstone on Stour who dealt with their operations in a dignified and respectful manner and their dedication to the task in hand was exemplary.

Our thanks must also go out to all those involved in the provision of catering. It must have been a logistical nightmare for them but they coped admirably ensuring everybody was fed and watered.

Our thanks go to those involved in critical incident debriefing, whose job will be ongoing for sometime to come and all those involved in post incident operations.

The list we would like to thank is endless. Needless to say that to all of you involved we extend a great hand of gratitude.

We were saddened to hear the news of the tragic loss of one of our members in Central Scotland.

Our thoughts and sincerest sympathies go out to the family of John Noble.

Mark A Rattray
FBU Brigade Chair
Warwickshire Fire and Rescue

This month

PAUL MARRIOTT PHOTOGRAPHY



20

Paul Oliver trains for a week-long, 244-kilometre run across the Sahara

Regulars

4 NEWS

Another tragedy, Union's revenue warning, regional controls 14 times over budget

7 NEWS SPECIAL

Union welcomes HSE improvement notice to Warwickshire

8 AERIAL LADDER PLATFORM

TUC launches Speak Up for Public Service campaign

16 WHAT DOES ...

A volunteer-turned-RDS firefighter do?

18 HEALTH

Irritable bowel syndrome

19 LAW AT WORK

Outstanding leave, discrimination

20 DAY OFF

The toughest foot race on earth

22 PUZZLES

Win a prize

23 STATION CAT

Brings you the news they don't want you to hear

24 25-YEAR BADGES

Features



IAN COOPER, EVENING GAZETTE MIDDLESBROUGH

10 EASY TARGET

Official figures underestimate the true level of attacks on firefighters

14 PENSIONS JUSTICE

Westminster must follow Scotland's lead on pensions for injured firefighters, says Union

PUZZLES

Win this month's quiz, and you'll get an iPod touch, Apple's all-in-one communications gadget with web surfing, email, music, video, photographs and traffic directions

WIN
an Apple iPod touch
see p22



COVER PICTURE:
MIKE WEBSTER

Published by the Fire Brigades Union, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston Upon Thames, KT2 7AE.
www.fbu.org.uk

Tel: 020 8541 1765. Fax: 020 8546 5187

Design by Edition Periodicals 241-251 Ferndale Road London SW9 8BJ. www.editionperiodicals.co.uk.

Printed by Southernprint Ltd, 17-21 Factory Road, Upton Industrial Estate, Poole, Dorset BH16 5SN.





We remember

JOHN NOBLE

Sub-officer John Noble from Alloa fire station in central Scotland was killed in a road traffic accident on 22 January while responding to an automatic fire alarm call from Strathdevon Primary School in Dollar, Clackmannanshire.

John Noble, 46, had 23 years service.

Another firefighter, 28-year-old Alan Robertson, was seriously injured in the crash. He was airlifted to Glasgow's Southern General hospital. The three other crew, all from the brigade's blue watch,

suffered minor injuries and were treated at Stirling Royal Infirmary.

Kenny Ross, Secretary of FBU Scotland, said: "It is part and parcel of the job that we do that we recognise the dangerous aspects of it. That danger starts the moment we leave the station. This tragedy has highlighted that. Here we have a firefighter going to help his local community who sadly won't be going back to his own family."

Central Fire Brigade CFO Steven Torrie said: "We are all absolutely devastated by this loss and extremely concerned about our injured colleagues. The thoughts of every single member of this service are with the

firefighter's family and the families of our injured colleagues."

The funeral service (above) was held on 1 February. An aerial ladder platform followed by family funeral cars left Alloa Fire Station and travelled to St. Mungo's Parish Church in Alloa. On the Union's part, FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack attended along with FBU Scotland officials and officials from other parts of the country.

John's family have requested that any donations be made to the Fire Service National Benevolent Fund: www.fsnbf.org.uk

For an online book of condolence visit www.centalscotlandfire.gov.uk



Firefighters arriving at
Coventry Cathedral

Hundreds attend memorial

WARWICKSHIRE FIRE

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack, President Mick Shaw and national, regional and local FBU officials joined hundreds of firefighters, MPs and Government ministers at a memorial service on Friday 25 January for the four firefighters who died on duty on 2 November 2007.

The service for John Averis, Ian Reid,

Ashley Stephens, and Darren Yates-Badley was held at Coventry Cathedral.

The Canon of Coventry Cathedral, Adrian Daffern, conducted the service.

Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service's Brigade Chaplain, The Reverend Canon David Capron and County Fire Officer, William Brown gave readings and tributes.

Soprano singer Catherine Bott performed during the service.

Union warns ministers of funding dangers

GRANT SETTLEMENT

The Union has warned ministers that there was a "real danger" that fire and rescue services would retreat back into carrying out work at a level which only ensured that statutory duties were being met.

In a meeting in January with John Healey MP, Minister of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), General Secretary Matt Wrack, Assistant General Secretary Andy Dark and President Mick Shaw said that there was little or no revenue support for the enormous amount of additional and entirely new work taken on by the service, nor of the extra statutory duties and that this lack of proper revenue support meant there was no incentive to take on any additional work unless it was fully funded.

The FBU leaders also said

that they were unconvinced that enough regard is being taken of the risk being faced by brigades, in particular New Dimension risks and the extraordinarily high industrial risks in brigades such as Cleveland.

In the meeting, held after the Union made its submission to the provisional grant settlement from central government to English fire authorities (timescales imposed by Government did not allow for a submission on Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales also), the Union said the level of settlement will mean some brigades will struggle to maintain levels of service over the next three years.

Highlighting the fact that commercial and business

fire losses had peaked in five out of the last six years, the Union also pointed out to ministers that firefighter deaths had hit a 30-year high.

Describing the settlement as "tough" but "broadly fair", Mr Healey told the Union at the meeting that CLG would make its final announcement after it had considered all of the views put to it as part of the consultation process.

He said the formula would be looked at in the run up to the next spending review and the Union's views would be valued as part of that review. Furthermore, he confirmed that the existing framework for efficiency savings would remain.

Floods last summer: Fire and rescue services have no statutory duty – and so no funding – to deal with floods

PAUL BOX/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK



Sounding off!

JIMMY SCOTT

FBU rep, Glasgow

National Shop Stewards Network

The National Shop Stewards Network was born in October 2006 at a conference sponsored by the transport union RMT and supported by the FBU, PCS, CWU, TGWU, NUJ, NUM, CYWU, POA and BFAWU. Disillusioned with New Labour and its policies of privatisation, "modernisation" and acceptance of George Bush's version of reality, 300 shop stewards and trade union activists from a number of unions called for "the establishment of a national shop stewards network".

Since then there have been meetings in London, Yorkshire, the North West and South West of England while a steering group has been established in Scotland.

The New Labour Government has lost its political identity. It no longer represents ordinary working peoples' views or interests. This view is most widely held in the FBU and RMT (and PCS were never affiliated) who disaffiliated politically and financially. The

Although many of us rejoiced in disaffiliating from New Labour we must be wary of depolitisation. Our pay, pensions and conditions are decided by politicians

NSSN hopes to strengthen the TUC by sharing common goals and objectives throughout the union movement. And hopefully it will help people re-engage with their union.

Here in Scotland, the FBU have secured some successes through the new SNP fire minister, Fergus Ewing. The SNP last November accepted the importance of the eight control rooms that we currently have. And in January they agreed that firefighters not able complete their role due to ill-health should receive a pension.

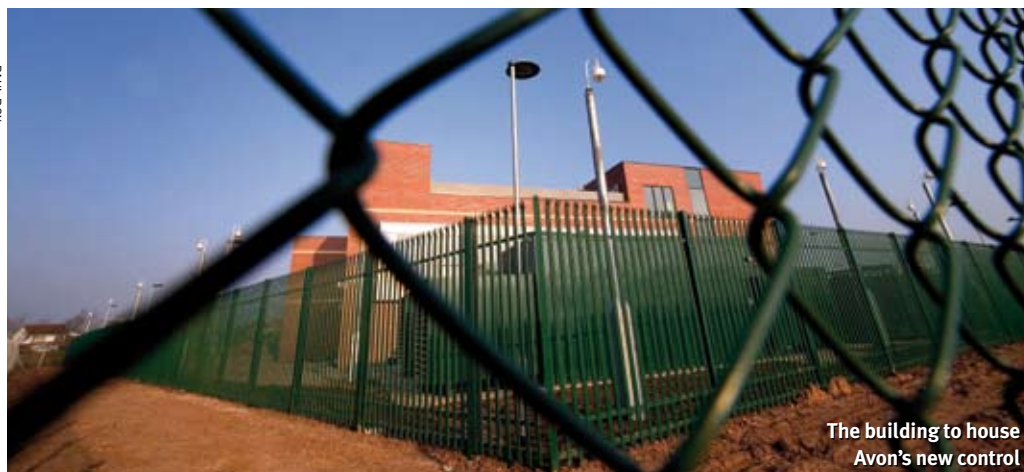
The FBU in Scotland is not trying to separate from FBU members in the rest of the UK, but act as an example to other brigades or regions who have suffered detrimental changes. And allow them to ask: "How come firefighters in Scotland are treated differently when we do the exact same job?"

The NSSN hopes to be a rank and file organisation who galvanises union members of every union that accept there is a need for grassroots involvement to shape and give voice to ordinary peoples' views.

Although many of us rejoiced in disaffiliating from New Labour we must be wary of depolitisation.

After all, our pay, pensions and conditions are decided by politicians.

→ For more information: www.shopstewards.net



The building to house
Avon's new control

14 times over budget and three years late

REGIONAL CONTROLS

Plans to close down all 46 of the fire service's 999 command and control centres in England and move to nine regional centres are now three years late and 14 times over budget according to the latest figures. The Union says the government urgently needs to re-think the plans, the time scales and the cost of the project now standing at £1.4 billion.

The Department for Communities and Local Government has repeatedly condemned the FBU for "scaremongering" over warnings that the plans would face major delays and that costs would soar. The new centres were set to start opening in November 2006 and are not now due to start opening until October 2009, a delay of nearly three years.

In a House of Commons written answer on

27 October 2005 on the original estimates for regional fire controls, then fire minister Jim Fitzpatrick said consultants Mott MacDonald "estimated project costs at £100 million, comprising project management costs, technology costs, accommodation costs and redundancy." That estimate later jumped to £1 billion, with the latest government answer to a question in the House of Lords confirming the cost will now rise to £1.4 billion, 14 times the original estimate.

FBU General secretary Matt Wrack said: "Frontline fire stations and firefighters are being threatened with cuts while this project soaks up hundreds of millions of pounds.

"The Government needs to re-think its plans and consider what impact this is having in local fire authorities being bled dry of cash. The current uncertainty and the burden this is placing on the fire service simply cannot be allowed to go on."

As the waters came flooding in, so did the claims

UIA INSURANCE

Summer 2007 broke records for all the wrong reasons. It was the wettest early summer since records began with many areas of the country deluged with rain and flooding causing widespread damage to many homes and businesses.

At UIA Insurance the priority was dealing with 160 flood claims from policyholders who had been affected by the flooding and needed a swift and reliable service. UIA teams rushed into action, adding extra capacity to their UK based call

centres to ensure all calls could be handled immediately.

When choosing home insurance, it is important to not only evaluate the right policy level in order to ensure all of



your valuables are covered, but also to think about the level of service you can expect to receive in the event of a claim. Consider whether your chosen insurer, like UIA, offers a claims line open day and night, 365 days

a year, only employs contractors who are experts in building repairs and disaster recovery and whether they provide temporary alternative accommodation as standard.

→ To talk to UIA, an approved supplier for FBU, about the home insurance cover they offer, call free on 0845 842 8421 (quote FF1) between 8.30am to 8pm Monday to Friday, and 9am to 1pm on Saturday. Alternatively visit www.fbuinsurance.co.uk for a quote or to buy online. FBU is an Introducer Appointed Representative of UIA (Insurance) Ltd, which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority.

In brief

◆ The Northern Ireland Executive has agreed to add £14-15m to the Fire Service budget following heavy lobbying by the FBU of politicians from all political parties. The service had been faced with swingeing cuts due to a shortfall of funding. Jim Barbour Executive Council member for Northern Ireland, described it as a "significant win" for FBU members and for the safety of communities in Northern Ireland. It was revealed in December that a funding shortage could jeopardise 26 fire stations.

◆ Campaigning will continue right up to the wire in Cleveland against the £1.85 million cuts package planned over the next three years. On Saturday 9 February FBU officials, members and some of their partners petitioned and leafleted in Middlesbrough town centre. In under four hours 2,300 signatures were collected for the FBU petition. Members of the public queued up to sign and at least one member of the fire authority, other local councillors, and the Chair of Cleveland Police Authority signed it. The IRMP consultation was to end on 24 February.

◆ A decision on the future of Falmouth and Camborne fire stations in Cornwall was expected at a fire authority meeting on 19 February, as *Firefighter* went to press. The Union has mounted a long and concerted campaign to ensure both stations continue to provide 24/7 cover, protecting the public night and day. In January it was revealed in a report for Cornwall's Community Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee by Chief Fire Officer Matt Littmoden that "station strengths are now at an absolute minimum". There will be a report on the decision in the next *Firefighter* magazine.

◆ Incitement of homophobic hatred will be illegal once draft legislation completes its way through Parliament. The introduction of the offence to make incitement of hatred against gays and lesbians illegal follows similar measures to tackle religious hatred. The change will come via amendments to the Criminal Justice and Immigration Bill. The Equality and Human Rights Commission says the law should be extended to hatred against transgender people.

Union welcomes HSE improvement notice

WARWICKSHIRE

The FBU has strongly welcomed the improvement notice served by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) on Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service following the deaths of four firefighters on 2 November.

It also welcomed the HSE view that “the brave men and women in the emergency services deserve to have the right equipment, the right training and information whilst fulfilling their pledge to protect the public.”

The HSE said the improvement notice indicates that the Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority should make an action plan for the inspection of premises that ensures links are made between the relevant prevention, enforcement and operations sections of WFRS and which gives priority to higher-risk premises.

This is to be done within a “realistic” timescale, taking account of all the information gathered and received by WFRS. The improvement notice also requires the authority to ensure that the arrangements are reviewed at “appropriate” periods. The authority is permitted to take equally effective steps to meet the requirements of health and safety legislation.

Alan Craddock, head of operations for the HSE in the Midlands, described the investigation as “complex” and said it involved a “thorough investigation of all aspects of the incident”.

He said the HSE team also has to consider the wider health and safety arrangements the fire and rescue authority has in place for managing risks, not only on the night in question but also more generally.

The HSE, with the police, is also looking at other “duty holders” involved with the premises as part of the investigation.

It said: “As a result of our work on this investigation HSE has formed the opinion, based on the evidence we have seen, that the current arrangements employed by the fire and rescue authority do not comply with the statutory duties to provide its firefighters with all the information they should have to assist them in making the appropriate decisions when attending a fire.

“We have therefore issued an improvement notice requiring the fire and rescue



Firefighters at the warehouse fire

JUSTIN TALLIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

authority to make the appropriate arrangements to gather and take action in response to information about special risks which may be present at premises where fire fighters may have to deal with emergencies”.

The service of an improvement notice, the HSE said, is “one step toward ensuring that Warwickshire fire and rescue authority fully complies with its duties for the protection of firefighters in the future.”

Alan Craddock said: “We recognise that there will be times when in order to protect the public, members of the fire service will expose themselves to danger and that it is

‘The improvement notice goes to the heart of the integrated risk management process. If fire brigades don’t gather information on risks properly, how can you accurately assess the resources required to deal with them?’

not possible to eliminate all risks. That is not what the law requires.

“What is required is that precautions are taken that are commensurate with the risks and the circumstances.

“In the course of operational incidents officers and their managers need to be able to make difficult decisions by access to the most complete information possible so that they can weigh what they are trying to achieve, be that the protection of lives or property, against what they are facing

and the level of risk to themselves and their colleagues.

“HSE believes that the brave men and women in the emergency services deserve to have the right equipment, the right training, and information whilst fulfilling their pledge to protect the public.”

The HSE said that there were “wider learning issues” that have arisen from the ongoing investigation, and for which they are “engaging” with Sir Ken Knight, Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor at the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Sir Ken would be issuing an “alert” to all fire and rescue authorities to “remind them of their legal obligations to gather such information and ensure it is easily accessible in the event of an operational incident,” the HSE said.

John McGhee, FBU national officer responsible for health and safety, said: “Our members are real life heroes, protecting the public day in day out, and we will fight to ensure that every fire authority makes their health and safety a priority.

“Although the improvement notice was served on Warwickshire County Council (acting as Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service), the FBU view is simply that all fire and rescue authorities must be able to demonstrate that they can comply with it.

“The improvement notice goes to the heart of the integrated risk management process. If fire brigades don’t gather information on risks properly, how can you accurately assess the resources required to deal with them?”

Speak up for public services

BRENDAN BARBER, GENERAL SECRETARY TUC



Public sector workers, including firefighters, are the victims of inflation, not its cause. This is the message that the TUC's 'Speak up for Public Services' campaign is taking to the Government, the media and the public – who all depend on good quality services.

The TUC's campaign – supported by its 26 member unions with public sector members – is making it clear that below inflation rises mean a pay cut for hard pressed public service workers.

The Government says that 2 per cent pay awards are needed to fight inflation. But the statistics show that public sector pay follows inflation. It does not cause it. If prices go up, then public sector pay usually catches up, but only after the price rises. And in any case private sector pay is going up faster than pay in the public sector. The Government is doing nothing to discourage this – even in Britain's boardrooms and the City of London where huge salaries and bonuses have been soaring with at least some inflationary impact as they drive up house prices. Even the Bank of England has acknowledged that these massive city bonuses, and rising prices for oil, food and housing have had a far greater impact on inflation than public sector pay.

The real measure of inflation is the Retail Price Index (RPI) which includes housing costs as well as the price of goods and services that we all buy. The private sector typically uses it to set their pay levels, and even the Government uses it when working out the increase in pensions and other "index-linked" benefits. Yet the Government wants to use the Consumer Price Index (CPI). But this leaves out council tax and housing costs. Not surprising perhaps, CPI is running at about half RPI.

The Government now says that it wants to see three-year deals in the public sector. This is something that may affect the fire service when negotiations start for 2008. Each union will decide its own best negotiating stance, but the TUC has always said that there is nothing wrong in principle with three-year pay deals.

But successful fair longer-term deals almost always involve some protection against future increases in inflation. The Government says long-term deals offer workers certainty, but when there is no

way of knowing what the cost of housing, energy or food will be in three years' time it is hard to call this certainty.

Below inflation pay deals for the next three years that lead to an annual reduction in living standards for public service workers are simply unfair, especially when pay awards in the private sector are keeping up with the cost of living. The Government's pay policy risks real financial hardship for the many low paid public sector workers at a time when household bills are soaring. It will damage morale in the public services, and this will inevitably make it harder to recruit the best new staff and will lead to experienced and skilled staff leaving their jobs.

Too often in the past we have had boom and bust – or perhaps better, bust and catch up – public sector pay. There have been undoubted improvements in public services since this Government came to power, but hitting the morale of six million public service workers will do nothing to counter the right wing tax-cutting agenda that is always looking to reduce the size of the state, privatise and cut public services.

The 'Speak up for Public Services' campaign says we need a fresh start. The Government must abandon its narrow two per cent ceiling on public sector pay, and recognise that public sector pay should reflect the living costs of public service workers.

But the campaign is not just about pay. It celebrates the public service ethos and the contribution, dedication and commitment public servants show in responding to emergencies, tackling floods and their aftermath, tackling terrorism and crime and delivering health, education, justice and welfare services to the country.

FBU members can also write to your MP to tell them your own story about how the Government's pay policy is affecting you. Over the next few months the 'Speak Up for Public Services' campaign will see unions working together to take our message of justice for public service workers forward. Now is the time to make sure your voice is heard. You deserve a fair deal.



→ You can keep up with the campaign at www.tuc.org.uk/speakup



Gordon Brown at a Labour
leadership hustings

PHILIP WOLMUTH/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

EASY target?

Attacks on firefighters are still unacceptably high. New research looks at the scale of the problem and what can be done to stop it

Attacks on fire crews – vicious personal assaults, bombarding by bricks, along with endless verbal abuse – continue to be a persistent feature of the job.

In October last year, a firefighter in Lancashire was hospitalised after youths threw a brick through an appliance window. The crew were attending a fire and had stopped at a set of traffic lights when they were targeted by the youths. The injured firefighter was taken to hospital.

In Lothian and Borders, firefighters have recorded attacks with mash hammers, spit, bricks, knives, blocks of wood, lumps of concrete and coins over the last year. One watch reported that a breeze block had been thrown off a bridge, crashing into the appliance.

General secretary Matt Wrack said: “It is almost unimaginable that firefighters trying to save a life or someone’s home will be attacked or abused on the way to the incident or at the incident itself. Yet that is what fire crews are now facing on a daily basis in some areas of the United Kingdom.”

Warning of the consequences for fire crews, he added: “Physical injury is an obvious outcome, but the threat of attack or persistent verbal abuse can demoralise, cause anxiety and increase stress, all of which damage your health.”

Official figures

New research by the Labour Research Department (LRD) for the FBU has established more clearly than ever the scale of attacks on firefighters.

LRD collected figures from every fire and rescue service in the UK under the Freedom of Information Act and found that there are more than 2,000 attacks on fire crews every

year, over 40 a week or six a day.

The new research revealed serious failings with the official figures, especially in England and Wales. In particular it disproved the claim by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) that attacks have fallen dramatically in recent years. The DCLG told the FBU last year that attacks in England and Wales had fallen from 1,300 in 2005-06 to 400 in 2006-07.

LRD’s research found that the government couldn’t even add up the figures it collects from fire and rescue services. The Department doesn’t publish its figures annually for public scrutiny, unlike its counterparts in Scotland.

The extent of underreporting

A detailed breakdown of attacks in each fire authority is published in the FBU/LRD *Easy Targets* report for the first time. However under-reporting is rife and FBU representatives estimate that the figure is at least twice as high – and quite possibly higher than that.

Kevin Geraghty from Avon FRS explained that: “Clearly these are under-reported. Going round the stations I know that there are far more than these. We do have a formal method for reporting these attacks but for a variety of reasons firefighters do not let us know about these occurrences.”

John Jenkins and Cerith Griffiths, FBU representatives in South Wales said that there were at least “daily” verbal attacks on firefighters and “weekly” objects thrown at them. This would equate to over 400 attacks a year – ten times the official figure.

And the issue goes beyond operational firefighters. Emergency fire control staff interviewed in Lothian and Borders FRS estimated that they were each verbally abused three or four times every week – which amounts to

almost a thousand verbal attacks on the four staff in one brigade alone in a year.

FBU representatives in most brigades confirmed that the official figures underestimated the true scale of attacks on firefighters. This was particularly true in brigades where official figures are relatively low.

Officials from Lancashire, Cumbria, Warwickshire, Shropshire, Kent, Surrey, East Sussex, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Avon, Devon and Somerset, Hertfordshire, London and Cornwall all estimated that attacks were at least twice as high – and in some cases ten times as high as officially reported.



IAN COOPER, EVENING GAZETTE, MIDDLESBROUGH

Government – no strategy

While the research showed that the DCLG has no clear idea about the scale of the problem, it also found that there is no national strategy for reducing attacks.

After the union's previous research on attacks, the Practitioners' Forum (which includes the FBU and chief fire officers) was asked to produce guidance. The result was Tackling Violence at Work: Good Practice Guidance Document for FRs (Circular 14/2007), published in March 2007.

The guidance, which applies in England and Wales, contains a list of measures which can be taken, but offers no centrally driven, coherent strategy to reduce attacks. It is not backed by new resources and simply devolves the problem to local fire authorities. But the Department was unwilling to discuss its strategies – or the lack of them – despite repeated attempts to do so.

Local policies

LRD wrote to every fire and rescue service to request information on their policies for tackling violence towards fire crews. The wide variety of responses indicated that fire-fighters face a postcode lottery on responses to violence, depending on where they work.

The best policies received were stand alone "Violence at Work" policies (separate

IAN COOPER, EVENING GAZETTE MIDDLESBROUGH



from civil disturbance policy), covering all personnel employed by the fire service, and not only operational firefighters.

Most Scottish authorities and nearly half of those in England and Wales had such a policy, although there was wide variation in their quality.

Model violence policies should contain the following items:

- Statement of intent
- Definitions of violence
- The law on violence at work
- Roles and responsibilities – managers and employees
- Prevention, control and management measures to tackle violence
- Action to be taken when an attack has taken place
- Monitoring and review of the policy
- Staff training requirements
- Support for staff involved in incidents of violence
- Investigation of violent incidents

The best policies were drawn up in consultation with local FBU reps and were subject to review through the usual channels of consultation, including on risk assessments for workplace violence.

Most Scottish policies referred explicitly to risk assessment. In England and Wales, West Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cheshire, Warwickshire, North Wales, Hertfordshire and Wiltshire authorities sent good examples of risk assessments. But this is a significant

area where FBU reps can have an input.

The research looked at the practical prevention, control and management measures that can help reduce attacks.

Prevention measures

In recent years a number of very positive initiatives have been developed to engage with teenagers, who are the typical perpetrators of attacks. These schemes involve working with the youth service and schools.

The LIFE (Local Intervention Fire Education) programme in London was introduced after two firefighters from Tower Hamlets were attacked and hospitalised in 2001. It now includes four out of five London boroughs.

In West Yorkshire, a scheme on community fire safety has run for over 15 years, and has adapted its programme to deal with attacks on firefighters. Cleveland FRS runs a one-week LIFE course, which is booked up for 12 months. Union representatives described the work as providing “positive role models” of firefighters.

In Northern Ireland, the programme includes Fire Intervention – a one-day, one-to-one programme for young people involved in anti-social behaviour, as well as the LIFE Scheme and drama and action days.

Lothian and Borders FRS runs community programmes such as “Crucial Crew” and “Phoenix Crew”, which are aimed at children with anti-social behaviour orders against them.

Most firefighters interviewed for this research argued that these youth and community schemes were the best long-term way to prevent attacks on crews.

The main concern was to ensure that funding for the schemes continues, as many rely on grants from outside the fire service – money that could easily be axed as budgets are cut.

The research also found examples of other prevention measures that could be used elsewhere. In Northern Ireland, a media campaign

with the message, “We’re the target, you’re the victim” concentrates on the consequences of attacks for firefighters and for people in the community, so as to avoid copycat assaults. It uses hard-hitting images as well as animation through a variety of media outlets to get the message across.

Control measures

Fire crews are realistic about the social causes of attacks and are well aware that it is not possible to prevent every single one. Senior fire officers have proposed a number of control measures to try to deal with attacks – though not all have met with the approval of firefighters.

Among these measures are police assistance, dynamic risk assessment, Closed Circuit Television (CCTV), better communication procedures and incident command systems, and improved vehicle and equipment security.

Most firefighters said they wanted police assistance when under attack. However many said that sometimes the police did not respond at all.

One manager went as far as to say that firefighters had “no confidence” in getting a rapid police response when under attack.

Another issue is the quality of the response. Some watches said they were concerned that the response sometimes consisted mainly or entirely of community support officers (CSOs), who lack the training and powers of police officers. Firefighters in Cheshire spoke of an incident where CSOs in attendance were not effective in tackling the youths who were attacking the firefighters.

At the other extreme, the Merseyside FRS had used a “trojan fire engine” containing police officers in hot spot areas around bonfire night. Local FBU representatives said that the union did not support this approach, as it undermined the impartiality of the fire service, antagonised community relations and caused “significant friction” with local youths.

An even more contentious issue is the use of CCTV. At least a quarter of all fire and rescue services have installed CCTV cameras on some of their appliances, while a handful are in the process of trialling helmet cameras.

Crews and FBU representatives were asked about CCTV and the comments were overwhelmingly critical (see box below).

Management issues

Most watches said that the issue of violence at work could be managed more effectively.

Many firefighters said they found reporting attacks to be cumbersome and difficult. Firefighters returning from an exhausting incident in some authorities are expected to fill out three pages of text, sometimes online on the intranet, in order to report an attack.



PHIL NOBLE/PA PHOTOS

Firefighters argued youth and community schemes were the best long-term way to prevent attacks

THUMBS DOWN FOR CCTV

In Northern Ireland, firefighters were adamant that CCTV was counterproductive. They said that firefighters live in the communities they work in (unlike the police) and some feared that they would have to leave if they came to be seen as part of the security services.

FBU representatives elsewhere said CCTV cameras would compromise the service’s neutrality. Management expressed similar sentiments, arguing that CCTV turns appliances into a target. Several firefighters described CCTV as a “Big Brother” measure.

In Cleveland, FBU

representatives Steve Watson and Brian Gibson said the key issue was “trust” and that CCTV would add to levels of distrust between firefighters and the communities they serve.

They said that cameras made firefighters “an arm of the police” and “blurred the line” between the two services. They argued that crime reduction was not their main job and that this opened them up to potentially more attacks.

In South Wales, the trial of cameras on appliances at one station was deemed a failure. Police considered CCTV images

too poor quality to be used as evidence, except for some identification purposes in one school. When proposed at another station, firefighters opposed it “vehemently”, arguing that it made them an arm of the police and undermined their neutrality.

Firefighters also expressed the fear that management would use CCTV images against them. During LRD’s research, fire officers in Cheshire did use CCTV footage for disciplinary action, causing disquiet among firefighters and breaching an understanding with the FBU that cameras were solely

for firefighter safety.

FBU representatives and a number of watches pointed to the costs of installing and maintaining the cameras, relative to the number of prosecutions likely to be gained from it.

The idea of helmet-mounted cameras were also greeted with derision by most firefighters. The overwhelming response was critical, arguing that they would turn individual firefighters into targets. FBU representatives also indicated that they were opposed to helmet cameras for the same reasons.



This cuts against routine reporting.

However some good examples of reporting systems were found, which could be used across the UK.

In West Yorkshire, each fire station has a “memory board” – a laminated A3-sized form pinned on the notice board. Firefighters who have been attacked can note the type of attack and the profile of the attackers on the board. These notes are then typed up by station clerks and sent to the health and safety department at headquarters.

Firefighters can also phone the control room or the health and safety department to report attacks. And tick box reporting forms are available on the fire service intranet. West Yorkshire FRS has also used a separate short staff questionnaire on violence to gauge staff opinion.

A recently installed computerised system in South Wales involves control staff recording any incidents mentioned over the radio. In South Yorkshire, a system of mandatory reporting was introduced in 2005 so officers in charge have to report on any attacks immediately after an appliance returns to the fire station.

At the same time some watches had constructive suggestions for improving the system.

In Lothian and Borders, one watch suggested having a dedicated phone line so that firefighters could report attacks and have them logged without having to do the paperwork themselves.

In Northern Ireland, FBU representative Tony Maguire argued that any new system should be “firefighter friendly”, with minimal time needed to record it.

A paper form already run off and available in the mess room was suggested, so firefighters could simply pick it up, fill it in and return it to management. The form itself should consist mainly of tick boxes, with little need for comment. Symbols could be used to indicate if it was an incident that should be followed up with a view to further action such as prosecutions.

Training for all fire service personnel is another area where improvements could be made. The research found that very few fire services provide comprehensive training on violence against fire crews.

In Lothian and Borders two stations had had training on ‘de-escalation’ techniques. The Northumberland policy on violence towards staff has a section on training, with the emphasis on diffusing situations and guidance on protective measures for personal safety and control measures. The policy is clear that “It does not extend to restraint”.

In South Wales, a firefighter from each watch of a station that receives a relatively high number of attacks was given conflict resolution training, provided by a company run by two former police officers.

The idea was that the trained firefighters would then disseminate the ideas to their colleagues. LRD spoke to one firefighter who had received the training. He said it was “useful”.

Some firefighters argued that all firefighters should receive general training on violence at work during their induction, supplemented

by further training if they worked in areas of increased risk.

Recommendations

The FBU does not believe that there are magic solutions to the problem of attacks. As Jim Barbour, FBU executive member put it: “There are no quick-fix sound bites” to resolve attacks on firefighters.

However there are things the government and senior fire officers can do to improve the situation:

- The DCLG should develop a coherent national strategy to tackle attacks on fire crews, in consultation with the union. It should include adequate reporting and collection methods and the production of comprehensive good practice guidance, backed by resources to help fire and rescue services implement local initiatives.

- Fire and rescue services should develop separate “Violence at Work” policies that follow the health and safety approach of risk assessment, prevention and control, with built in monitoring and review involving fire service personnel and their representatives.

- The DCLG and fire and rescue services should ensure that adequate funding is available for community youth and education programmes, and that these programmes tackle the issue of attacks as an integral part of these programmes.

- The DCLG and fire and rescue services should run public awareness campaigns using the media and other channels to highlight the consequences of attacks on fire crews.

- Fire and rescue services should introduce a moratorium on the use of CCTV until its implications have been thoroughly researched.

- The DCLG and fire and rescue services should develop straightforward and easy to use reporting systems to fully measure the scale of attacks and their severity.

- Fire and rescue services should train all fire service personnel on the issue of violence, during induction and as part of later training programmes.

→ Easy Targets? Tackling attacks on fire crews in the UK: A report for the FBU by the Labour Research Department, can be found on the FBU website: www.fbu.org.uk

FIGURES IN BRIEF

	2005-06	2006-07
England	1,303	1,438
Wales	56	66
Scotland	329	309
Northern Ireland*	342	285
TOTAL UK	2,030	2,098

* A different system of data collection operates in Northern Ireland.



Scotland listens, Whitehall must too

The Union has welcomed the announcement by Scotland's Community Safety Minister Fergus Ewing that he will take decisive action to stop injured firefighters being sacked without a pension and has called for Whitehall to see sense and quickly follow suit

In a move welcomed by the FBU, Scottish Ministers have agreed to introduce revised guidance on firefighters' ill-health pensions for Scotland's eight fire and rescue authorities to remove the uncertainty caused by the guidance issued by the department of Communities and Local Government. The decision in Scotland, which came after representations by the Union, should be followed by Whitehall, the FBU has said.

In announcing the decision, Fergus Ewing, Scotland's Minister for Community Safety, said: "We view the changes made in the 2006 guidance as unfair as they could potentially result in a firefighter seriously injured in the line of duty being both denied access to an ill-health retirement pension and possibly losing his or her job. The people of Scotland are well aware of the debt we owe to our fire and rescue professionals and the risks they take to protect our communities. We owe it to them, to ensure they are treated fairly."

'I emigrated to New Zealand to get away from

After retiring on ill-health, Kevin Reade wanted to get as far away from his former employer as possible – to New Zealand. Then his brigade "reviewed" his pension, cut it and forced him back to England for the appeal. Now they're refusing to reimburse his air fare.

Three years after he was retired from the fire service on ill-health, Kevin Reade decided to get away from it all. A long way. He left his home in Warwickshire and, with his wife and then eighteen month old daughter, travelled over 11,500 miles to start a new life in rural New Zealand. His new home, north of Napier City on the East Coast of the North Island, is 35 kilometres from the nearest shop. To get to Kevin's house, you have to drive down 13 kilometres of gravel road.

Says Kevin: "We live in a very remote location because I cannot and do not want to communicate with people. We have electricity, but no mains water or sewerage, no street lighting, no refuse collection, no mains gas, and cell phones do not work here. We only get post delivered three times a week, and a radio transmitter connects the phone.

"The nearest neighbours are farmers, who keep themselves to themselves. My wife has to journey the 40 minutes drive each way into

work every day along a route, which in the bad weather, is sometimes only driveable with a 4x4. We have a river in front of the house, which occasionally floods, covering the bridge, which is the only way into town, and consequently, we can be stranded at home for up to four days at a time.

"We purchased this house because I feel happier that it is so remote from everywhere and everyone.

Kevin, an ADO with 27 years service, was medically retired from Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service in 2001 after being bullied by the County Fire Officer, who was forced to retire for these actions.

A Clinical Psychologist and Consultant Psychiatrist commissioned by the Fire Service diagnosed Kevin with agitated depression and chronic anxiety. Both said that he should retire, and it was the fault of the Service, says Kevin. They also said that he should get some treatment to help, but the brigade refused to pay for it as he was to be retired.

Says Kevin: "I retired but couldn't face anything to do with the Fire Service. It helped a little when my family and I emigrated to New Zealand to get away from everything. Then they dragged me back."

Five years after retirement and some two years after Kevin had sought a new start Down Under, he received news that would see him forced to return to England and the unfriendly face of the fire service again – plus a cut in his pension to boot. His life looked like it was to be turned upside down again.

WFRS wrote to Kevin in September 2006 stating that, due to a change in the Government guidance on ill-health pensions since he retired, they were re-assessing all retirees and he would have to go to see an Independent Qualified Medical Practitioner (IQMP).

They arranged for Kevin to see an IQMP in New Zealand, who told Kevin that he "wasn't qualified in matters of mental health." His report nevertheless said that Kevin wasn't suffering from the illness diagnosed by the psychologist and psychiatrist, it reduced the degree



Retired member Kevin Reade lives 35 km from the nearest shop

Roddy Robertson, FBU Executive Council member, Scotland, said: "Once again the Scottish Government has listened to the voice of professional firefighters in Scotland. The announcement will be a massive relief to firefighters in Scotland. We have seen common sense prevail. These logical and fair decisions show what can be achieved when those in positions of power truly listen to trade union members who deliver vital public services. We hope now that this decision will be the catalyst for similar guidance for Firefighters throughout the rest of the UK and that it will bring to an end post code entitlements for our members in their time of need."

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: "Firefighters across the UK expect the same protection when we take the same risks at the same incidents and that includes a pension if we are seriously injured. Whitehall's months of indecision have caused enormous anxiety among fire crews across the UK. It is the simplest and easiest decision to do the right thing and do it quickly, as they have announced they will do in Scotland."

The breakthrough in Scotland came as Matt Wrack and other senior FBU officials were preparing to attend on Wednesday 20 February the first meeting of the Ill Health

Review Group, a working group announced in January by Fire and Rescue Service Minister, Parmjit Dhanda that is to examine the concerns raised by the Union among other issues. Fire service "stakeholders," the Treasury and the Government Actuary's Department have been invited while Lindsay Bell of Peter Betts of the DCLG are chairing.

The Union is sceptical about the working group's terms of reference and just how quickly it will reach its conclusions. Says Matt Wrack: "There is only one thing the Ill Health Review

Whitehall's months of indecision have caused enormous anxiety

Group needs to do – move swiftly to lift the current guidance and end this disgraceful attack on our members' pension rights."

The announcement of the working group was made during a parliamentary adjournment debate on the issue of firefighters' ill-health pensions that had been secured after intense lobbying of MPs by FBU members and officials. Parmjit Dhanda had told MPs that: "I fully understand the concerns expressed by the Fire Brigades Union...that it was never

the Government's intention for an injured Firefighter not to receive an appropriate award or to be left with no job or recompense. It is really important to have that on the record so that Fire and Rescue Services are aware of that when they take these decisions."

The parliamentary debate was requested by MP for Nottingham East John Heppell, who told the minister and fellow MPs that recent CLG guidance meant "It is almost impossible to be declared unfit for the job," and that: "It is terrible that those whom we expect to put their lives on the line every day should, if they are injured as a result of that, be told, 'I'm sorry, but there's nothing we can do ... The only thing that a chief fire officer can do is sack them'."

The Union is determined to get Justice for Firefighter Pensions and is fighting on a range of fronts – including the legal avenue: a Judicial Review on the matter is due to be heard on 6-7 March. Members will be kept informed.

→ FBU members and officials' political lobbying efforts have been central to progress on the issue of ill-health pensions and all are urged to continue this as well as attend branch meetings. For more visit www.fbu.org.uk

everything. Then they dragged me back'

Kevin Reade and family at his new home in rural New Zealand



of disablement and it recommended that his injury award pension be cut. In April 2007, on the basis of this report, the Service reduced Kevin's pension.

Kevin appealed the decision, asking the Board the question: 'To calculate the degree of disablement arising from the incapacity described by the IQMP as "Agitated Depression Chronic Anxiety".'

He says: "I asked for the Board to be held in New Zealand as I found it extremely difficult to travel now. The Service stated that although the rules allowed for it to be done in another place, I would have to come to England for the appeal, or a judgment would be made in my absence. I knew that to have the best possible chance of success I had to attend."

"I travelled back to the UK for the appeal, but the only way I could face it was to bring my wife and daughter with me for support. I had to pay for myself on my reduced pension, which meant putting it all on a credit card, which is still unpaid."

The Board changed the diagnoses of the IQMP and increased the degree of disablement estimated by the IQMP - although it is still below the level that it was. As far as Kevin is concerned, he successfully brought the appeal and expenses should be paid – but the brigade is refusing to pay any of the expenses.

"When I returned home, I put in a claim for travelling expenses as the rules stated that I should, if I was successful in bringing the appeal, and they found in my favour in relation to the question they were asked."

"It has cost me approximately £4,000 to bring the appeal. We already have large mortgage to pay on a reduced pension. Now we are struggling to pay this bill off too. The Service was informed that this was a big problem for me, but was not interested and did not even bother to respond. The way I have been treated is a travesty of natural justice."

→ The Union is working with Thompsons solicitors on Kevin's case.

WHAT DOES A VOLUNTEER- TURNED-RDS FIREFIGHTER DO?

For Malcolm “Hanners” Hannah, watch manager, the switch from auxiliary to retained status of Beaully fire station – one of 61 in Highlands and Islands FRS to have been upgraded – has made a ‘huge difference’. The motivation, commitment and the uniforms may be the same, but, increased resources mean crews are better equipped to do the job



Malcolm Hannah:
‘It all comes down
to resources’

Firefighters at Beaully, 12 miles west of Inverness, have always been an inventive and resourceful bunch. In the early eighties, crew members used their own cars to tow a trailer full of firefighting equipment to incidents. As volunteer, or auxiliary firefighters they even raised money for their own paging system when the old air raid siren which signalled callout was removed.

Beaully has an impressive track record as one of the busiest auxiliary units in the Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service – which spans a land mass the size of Belgium. Inverness is the only wholetime station; fire cover in the rest of the sparsely populated area has traditionally been provided by public-spirited yet under-resourced volunteer or auxiliary crews, only paid when called out.

Beaully crew members were keen to join the FBU as auxiliaries, and are proud of their membership of a union which has long campaigned for better resources to improve fire cover across the region. In 1996, there was even a cost-cutting proposal to shut Beaully and other units – prompting the union to consider industrial action if fire cover was removed.

But it didn't come to that. A Highlands

and Islands Fire Authority audit made the case for more investment, not station closures, backing up what the FBU had argued for all along. Community councils and local MP Charles Kennedy also campaigned for a boost in resources.

With fresh investment sanctioned, change was called for. And in April 2005 Beaully, along with 61 fire units scattered amid the vast H&I region, was upgraded to retained status. Crew members became official employees of the Highlands and



Beaully firefighters



PICTURES: ROSS GRAHAM

Islands Fire and Rescue Service, receiving a retaining fee for the first time. Contracts were signed and most retained firefighters had to make themselves available for turnout for up to 120 hours a week. Before this, volunteers were effectively on call at all times – and only paid for attending incidents. The public is now benefiting from better-equipped, better-trained crews.

Beaulieu was among the units identified as in need of a proper station. Until last autumn, the village fire “station” was a green metal container with no running water plonked on a lorry park behind the police station. Before that, a garden shed had sufficed. Now a new purpose-built station has opened on the same site – complete with a meeting room, kitchen, toilet and a storage room for breathing apparatus.

Watch manager, Malcolm “Hanners” Hannah, a Beaulieu firefighter for 20 years, says the status switch from auxiliary to retained has made a “huge difference” – and it all comes down to resources. The motivation, commitment and the uniforms may be the same. But increased resources

mean crews are better equipped to do the job. “We’ve been fighting every step of the way to get more resources for the station. We now feel we’ve finally moved into the 21st century,” says Malcolm.

In common with retained units across the UK, the Beaulieu crew have local day jobs: Malcolm is in electrical wholesale and firefighting colleagues include local farmers, teachers and mechanics. As *Firefighter* went to press, there were plans to recruit two extra crew members – boosting the team to 12.

Fraser Parr, brigade chair in the Highlands and Islands for the past 20 years is among those FBU stalwarts who have battled for better resources over the years. “We’ve been fighting for this for a long time” says Fraser, who, as a local councillor, is well plugged into what local people want to see from their fire service. The audit proved the union’s case. It pointed up the need for “more resources not less” and made the case for the Highlands and Islands receiving a “bigger slice of the cake” when it came to sharing out Scottish fire and rescue resources, he says.

Money for new equipment and building new stations helped pave the way for the switch from auxiliary to retained and the public is now benefiting from improved fire cover. In areas where retained crews were not established, volunteers still play a very valuable role in boosting community safety, Fraser is quick to point out. And they are very welcome in the FBU. “We represent everyone – from volunteers to wholetime firefighters, from those working in control to retained members and officers too. We are one union.”

Organising and recruiting volunteer firefighters can prove problematic for all kinds of reasons – it is far easier to recruit at a big inner city station where people’s subs are deducted from pay rather than from volunteers who only get paid when they attend incidents. But, as the Beaulieu crew proved, some have been very keen to sign up, pay their subs and reap the benefits of union membership. When crews have retained status, some

The public is now benefiting from better-equipped, better-trained crews

of the logistical problems are overcome – contracts ensure crews are paid for when they are available, not just when they are called out.

The Union has been in contact with many of the firefighters in the newly upgraded fire stations in the area and, says Fraser, many not yet organised by the Union are now deciding to join. In the Highlands and Islands, as elsewhere in the UK, retained members play a key role in firefighting – and in the Union.

Working For You



IAN MURRAY

Regional Chair

Yorkshire & Humberside

The FBU campaign continues against the most savage cuts ever proposed in the fire service in Humberside. There are plans to close four fire stations (Sledmere, Waltham, Kirton Lindsey and Hull Central) remove a fire engine at another (Immingham West) and end the immediate response capability of a fire engine at another (Goole). As fire appliances can attend, assist, support and provide cover well outside their station areas, these cuts will have an impact across Humberside.

The cuts will see the loss of one in ten frontline firefighter posts. If the plans go ahead we would have between 100 and 110 fewer frontline firefighters to deal with all the emergency incidents the fire and rescue service needs to respond to.

The Union is determined to fight these cuts: a campaign group has been formed that includes representatives from all of the stations affected while personnel from each station are mounting their own initiatives within their communities, collecting signatures on petitions, getting members of the public to send in letters of opposition to the cuts to chief fire officer Frank Duffield. In one weekend in February, we amassed around 5,000 signatures against the plans.

Lobbies of councillors continue and so far we are getting great support from across the political parties in all areas. In January all of Hull City’s independent councillors organised a weekend petition-signing event in the city centre and, with the help of a dozen firefighters, managed to get near 1,300 letters of objection from members of the public. In February after hearing evidence from management, FBU, MPs and other councillors, two councillors decided they were unconvinced of the fire authority’s arguments and resigned from the scrutiny panel to join the FBU campaign against the cuts.

MPs are now also starting to get on board. For example, Ian Cawsey (Lab, Brigg & Goole) met FBU officials and then went on to meet the chief fire officer. After his meeting the MP went on TV stating he had not been convinced by the CFO’s case.

With the local media also behind us, running ‘Stop the Fire Cuts’ campaigns and online petitions, Humberside members have built a highly effective campaign – and will be fighting, in the name of public and firefighter safety, right up to the end of the IRMP consultation period on March 31.

Watch what you eat

Up to one-third of us experience the symptoms from time to time

IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME

As the most common disorder of the digestive system, up to one-third of us experience symptoms of Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) from time to time. The good news is that IBS is not serious and most people can manage it well.

IBS consists of a number of symptoms, the most common being abdominal pain or abnormal bowel habit. Other symptoms vary from person to person but can include bloating, a sense of incomplete emptying of the bowels and passage of mucus from the anus. You may also notice that you lack energy and are sleeping poorly.

Women are slightly more affected by IBS than men and the usual age for patients to seek advice is between 20 and 40 years old. IBS is one of the commonest reasons for patients to visit a GP.

What causes IBS?

There is no single cause of IBS and people may develop the condition for a number of reasons. For some, eating irregularly or taking an abnormal diet may be responsible. Others notice IBS developing after they have had a bout of food poisoning or gastroenteritis.

Should I see my doctor?

You may have had symptoms for many years without seeking help from your doctor, and this is fine as long as you are coping well. If you do choose to visit your GP, they will probably make a diagnosis based on the symptoms you describe. It may be necessary to perform blood tests to check for intolerance to wheat, rule out anaemia, make sure that the liver and thyroid gland are working properly, and exclude any evidence of inflammation within the bowel.

If you develop any of the alarm symptoms listed below, you should certainly ask for advice.

- ◆ A change in bowel habit – especially if you are over the age of 40
- ◆ Passing blood from the back passage
- ◆ Unintentional weight loss of more than 2

kg (4 pounds)

- ◆ Diarrhoea waking you from sleep
- ◆ Fever

What treatments are available for IBS?

If a dietary cause is suspected your doctor may be able to give you some advice on what to eat or may suggest that you see a dietician to identify foods that upset you. You may be advised to leave out particular sorts of foods from your diet. If constipation is the main problem then bulking agents such as natural

KEY HELP POINTS

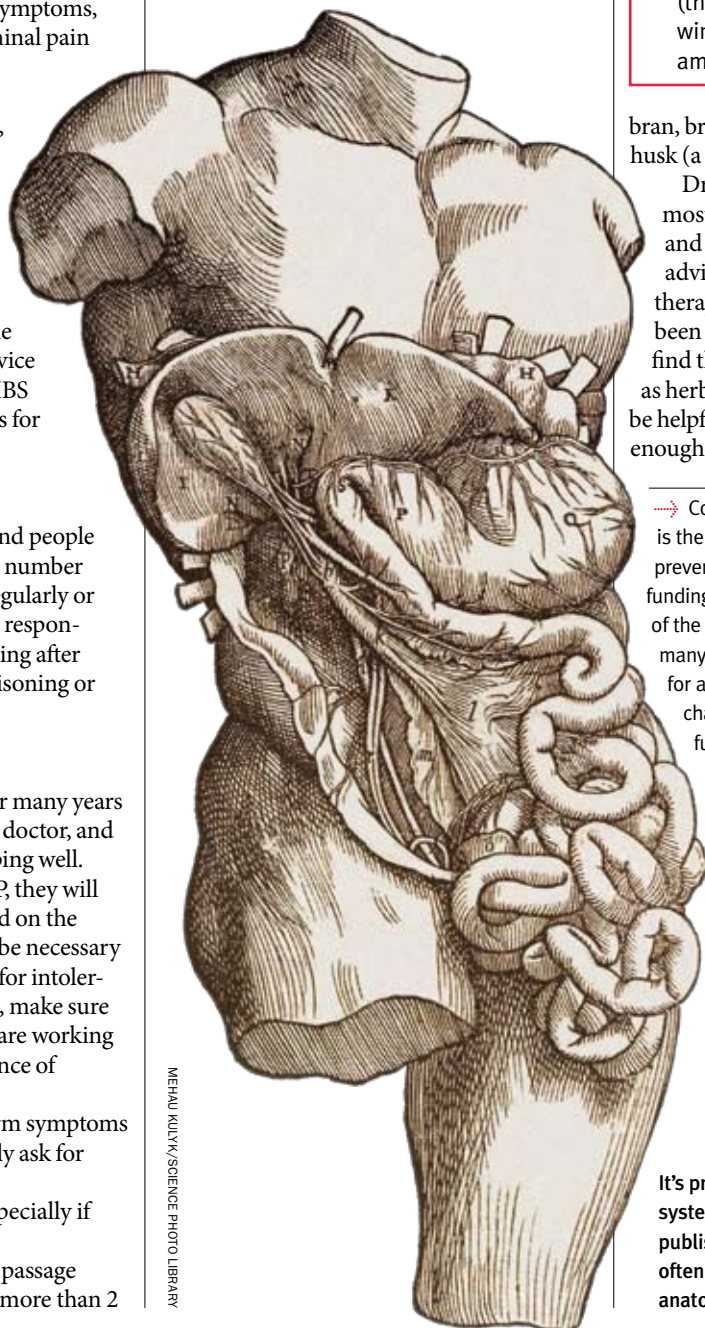
- ◆ Take care over what you eat and when. It is good to develop a regular routine for opening your bowels.
- ◆ Keep a food diary together with a record of bowel symptoms to help determine if there is a pattern
- ◆ Foods which commonly cause upset include wheat products, dairy products, onions, nuts and caffeine. Some patients cannot digest lactose (the sugar in milk) and so develop wind and diarrhoea after taking large amounts of milk or dairy products

bran, bran-containing cereals and ispaghula husk (a natural laxative) are helpful.

Drugs to reduce bowel spasm are mostly available without prescription and your pharmacist will be happy to advise you. Hypnotherapy and relaxation therapy have also been tried and both have been shown to be effective. Some patients find that complementary therapies such as herbal medicine and aromatherapy can be helpful, although at present there isn't enough evidence to be sure about this.

→ Core – the Digestive Disorders Foundation is the only charity in the UK which works to prevent, cure or treat gut and liver diseases by funding high quality medical research. Diseases of the gut or liver cause pain and distress for many people in the UK and tragically account for around one in eight deaths. Core relies on charitable donations and urgently needs funds both to undertake more research and to continue its information programme. Core provides quality information for sufferers on a wide range of digestive problems through its website: www.corecharity.org.uk or through leaflets and fact sheets available from Core, 3 St. Andrews Place, London NW1 4LB or by e-mailing info@corecharity.org.uk

It's probably not this bad – the digestive system from *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, published in Belgium in 1543 by Vesalius, often referred to as the father of modern anatomy



MEHAU KULYK/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

Outstanding leave

Q In our brigade my colleagues and I have had problems being able to take leave. This goes back as many as three years and some people have a large amount of outstanding leave accrued. Management have now started asking us if we are prepared to accept payment for this. Many want to but I have heard that this could be unlawful. Is this right?

A There are two aspects to this question – contractual rights, and rights under the Working Time Regulations (WTR).

As for contractual rights, the Grey Book says that holiday not taken in the holiday year is lost, subject to a right (if management agree) to take previously untaken holiday within the first twelve weeks of the next holiday year.

This does not give management the right to refuse holiday within the year it accrued. If they have done so members are entitled to either take that subsequently or agree payment in lieu. But this should not be delayed as appears to have happened to date and steps should now be taken to resolve this quickly.

However, where there has been agreement, as appears in this case, for holiday to be held over for longer, employees retain the right to that leave, or payment in lieu.

Whilst the Grey Book only provides for a payment in lieu on the termination of an individual's employment, there is nothing to stop individual employees agreeing to accept a payment in lieu instead. Although doing so should not be encouraged as it undermines the purpose behind annual leave.

As for the WTR, they only allow, up to 1 October 2007, four weeks leave including bank

holidays. From 1 October 2007, this will increase to 4.8 weeks and from 1 April 2009, to 5.6 weeks. The amended WTR will allow the extra holiday to be subject to a payment in lieu instead, up to 1 April 2009, with the agreement of the employee.

So up to 1 April 2009, if an employee has had at least 4 weeks holiday during each holiday year, the WTR will allow the employer to make a payment in lieu of the extra 0.8 weeks leave if the employee agrees. After 1 April 2009, that will not be allowed. But the amended WTR will allow the carry over of the extra 1.6 weeks leave into the

next holiday year from 1 April 2009, with the agreement of the employees or their union.

Finally, note that any payment in lieu should be based on annual salary divided by the number of working days in the year, and not 365.

I've been moved

Q I am a firefighter and recently returned to work after maternity leave to find I have been moved to another fire station some distance from my home. I believe that this is discrimination due to my

pregnancy. What action can I take?

A After Ordinary Maternity Leave (26 weeks) a woman is entitled to return to the same job she was employed in before she was absent on the same terms and conditions as if she had not been absent.

After Additional Maternity Leave (between 26 and 52 weeks) the position is different: the basic right to return to the job remains unless the employer can show it is not reasonably practicable for her to return to do so, in which case she has the right to be offered suitable alternative work on similar terms and conditions.

You would need to lodge a written grievance regarding your move setting out that you believe you are entitled to return to the same post after maternity leave. The failure to allow you to do so may amount to sex discrimination. You should also point out the problems the move is causing you practically and highlight the apparent lack of consultation. Obviously you should ensure that a union rep attends any meetings to discuss your grievance.

If the matter isn't resolved you would have three months from the date of the move to lodge a Tribunal claim. Time limits can be extended by three months by lodging a grievance but you should get advice early from the Union and not rely on an extension.

→ Write in with your legal problem to legalbeagle@fbu.org.uk and those of widest relevance to FBU members in the workplace will be selected and answered in future editions. With thanks to Thompsons solicitors.



SATOSHI KAMBAYASHI

Legal Beagle

Answers to some frequently asked legal questions that members put to the FBU

'I'm the fittest I've ever been, but you can't take anything for granted'

It lasts a week and is the equivalent of five and a half regular marathons. Paul Oliver explains why he's running the Marathon des Sables in the Sahara

Cambridgeshire firefighter Paul Oliver may be only 27, but he's a bit of a veteran when it comes to testing his own limits – and raising cash for Macmillan Cancer Support. He's already "rowed" the equivalent of a double marathon in a city centre supermarket and run along Norfolk coastal paths for the charity. Now he's off to compete in one of the world's toughest races. And there's still time to sponsor him ...

Early in April Paul, a firefighter based at St Neots, Cambridgeshire, will be running the equivalent of six back-to-back marathons across the Sahara desert in the baking Moroccan heat.

Anti-venom pumps for scorpion bites

The Marathon Des Sables is known as the world's toughest race, and attracts ultra distance marathon runners from around the world. It is fiercely contested – the route is kept under wraps until the day before it starts to prevent cheating. Many do not complete the 144-mile trek. And those who do can test themselves to the limit – temperatures plummet at night and water supplied en route is strictly rationed. Competitors are given nine litres a day, distributed at various points, and anyone who drinks more will be automatically disqualified.

Runners also carry their own food and supplies. Compulsory kit includes an emergency distress flare, anti-venom pump for scorpion and snakebites, goggles to protect eyes from whirling sandstorms, and food for

PAUL OLIVER

Paul Oliver, a 27 year-old firefighter at St Neots, Cambridgeshire will this month compete in The Marathon Des Sables, testing his own limits – and raising cash for Macmillan Cancer Support.



MARATHON DES SABLES

Distance: 244 km

Time: 6-7 days

Speed: 3-14 km/hour

Temperature (Midday): 120°F

Terrain: 15-20% sand dunes; plus uneven
rocky stony ground

REALMOROCCO.COM

the journey. Then there is the sleeping bag and cooking utensils.

Says Paul: "The only thing you don't have to carry is the tent. There are about eight or ten runners to a tent, which the organisers carry, and they try and put you with people who speak the same language. I'm hoping to latch onto someone who is of the same ability as me so we can keep each other company, set the pace and help each other out if we are struggling. I reckon I'm the fittest I've ever been and certainly expect to complete the race. But you can't take anything for granted."

Paul has now got his backpack down to 11 kilos – and, along with the anti-venom pump, he will be packing the kind of food he doesn't normally eat. "You have to eat stuff that's high in protein, and sugars to keep your energy up. I'll be taking peanuts and beef jerky – the beef is marinated in salt and oil and is pretty disgusting. But it should help me keep going."

It all sounds very gruelling. Last year, a competitor died of a heart attack, and nearly a decade ago, a runner got lost for nine days. He was found badly dehydrated, and only survived, says Paul, by eating bats and drinking his own urine.

Paul, a former business and finance student, joined Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service at the beginning of last year. He loves the job and has been keeping himself in good shape.

In the run up to the mega-marathon, he has been training hard, mixing long distance runs with cycling then building up his strength through hill running, carrying weighty rucksacks to prepare him for the rigours of the southern Moroccan desert.

Running the desert race is one of Paul's long-held

ambitions, and he thought it made sense to combine fulfilling it with raising cash for the Macmillan Cancer Care, famous for providing people diagnosed with cancer and their families with practical and emotional support.

Paul has first-hand experience of how valuable this can be – his older brother was diagnosed with malignant melanoma a few years ago but now feels fine. In fact, he was up and running just two months after treatment at King's Lynn hospital. He joined his brother in what was to become the first of Paul's Macmillan fund-raising ventures. It was a mere 191-mile run along the North Norfolk coast, with overnight camping stops. Paul is very keen on raising awareness of the crucial role Macmillan nurses can play in people's lives when someone gets cancer, and how it can effect the whole family.

All sponsorship goes to Macmillan nurses

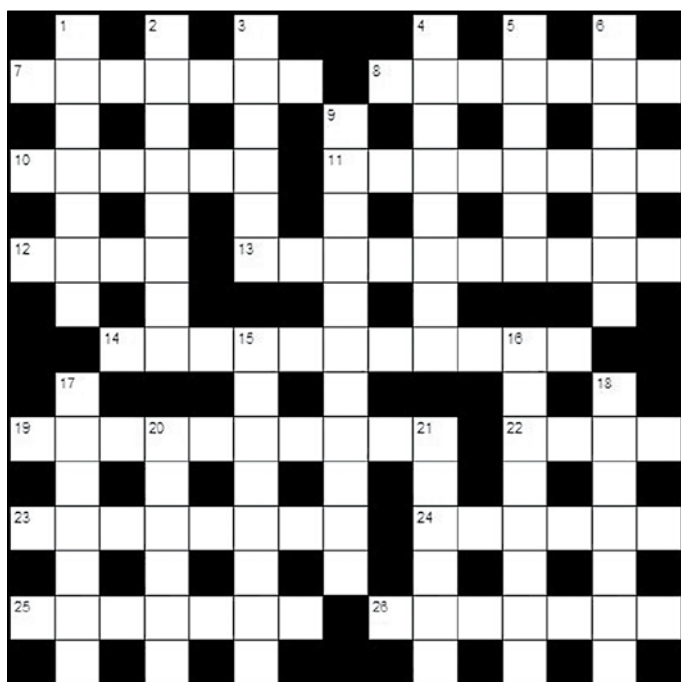
"I can't praise Macmillan nurses enough. My brother and I are keen runners, and always enjoyed good health. So when he was diagnosed it was a shock to the whole family, especially as his wife had just given birth to their second child. When I first heard the news I felt completely helpless and almost guilty – I didn't even contact him for over a week as I just didn't know what to say.

"Luckily, the Macmillan nurses were on hand to offer him the emotional support he needed to get through his ordeal and, thanks to his treatment and care he has fully recovered. Personally, I don't think they get paid enough for what they do or get enough credit for it."

Paul is happy to pay his own entry fee and expenses: all sponsorship money will go straight to the charity through the "justgiving" link.

→ www.justgiving/poliver.com
www.saharamarathon.co.uk

Quick Crossword

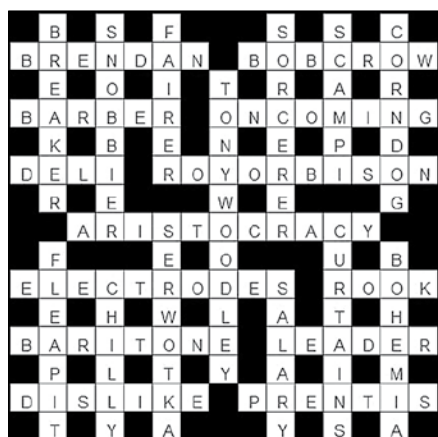


ACROSS

- 7, 25** Democratic presidential hopeful (7, 7)
8 Mad fruits? (7)
10 Juvenile domestic pet – often found in trees? (6)
11 Firefighters suffer too many of them (8)
12, 24 Republican presidential front-runner (4, 6)
13 Smashing into many pieces (10)
14 They are built up to hold back water or carry rails or roads (11)
19 Reliable (10)
22 Parent's sister (4)
23 Impetus, gained by movement (8)
24 See 12
25 See 7
26 Desired something of someone else's (7)

DOWN

- 1** Temporary guest (7)
2 Precious metal (8)
3 Marks hide with hot metal (6)
4 Tape-holding case inserted in player (8)
5 Big cat, fast car (6)
6 Facing the bowling (7)
9 Democratic presidential hopeful (6, 5)
15 Opposite of subtraction (8)
16 Snatcher of milk, closer of collieries (8)
17 Springs back (in horror, perhaps) (7)
18 Single-handed (7)
20 Watching – admiringly or suspiciously? (6)
21 North Devon national park (6)



Solution to
January/
February
crossword

Answers to
January/February
quiz

1. Wembley
2. Gordon Brown became prime minister
3. Joe Calzaghe
4. Paul McCartney
5. Australia
6. Dame Helen Mirren

Winner of
November/
December quiz
was Roger Pickett
of Essex



Prize Quiz

Win an Apple iPod Touch

Enter our prize quiz and it could be yours.
The theme this month is sport.



1 Name the football club that plays at the Nou Camp.

2 The 'flying dismount' is the trade mark finish of which horse racing jockey?

3 For what sport is Cowes famous?

4 Name the north western French city which gives its name to a 24-hour car race

5 In golf what is an "eagle"?

6 Who famously told an umpire: "You cannot be serious?"



HOW TO ENTER

To win the Apple iPod Touch, please send your answers to the Prize Quiz by 31 March 2008 on a postcard to: Prize Competition (March 2008), FBU Head Office, Bradley House, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey, KT2 7AE. Include your name, address and membership number. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries.





StationCat

... brings you the news they don't want you to hear

Station Chimp



Recent TV news items have highlighted how clever chimps are at numbers. Station Chimp Consultancy services is helping the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLoG) with counting up, something the department struggles with.

Take the DCLG press release of 14 December 2007 trumpeting "Fires continue to fall". DCLoG tries its very hardest to only ever refer to fires, nothing else counts as work when it comes to calling for cuts. They don't collect statistics for the number of floodings attended by FRS, which seems rather odd after the summer of 2007.

Some types of fires are down (and these are only for one year). But, critically, the total number of fires is UP by over 6,000, making the headline claim entirely wrong.

You can try asking them to justify the central claim that fires are down, and some of you have. **But on Magic Planet DCLoG the happy pills have taken full effect and the number of fires is down, even when they are up by several thousand.**

Ministry of mayhem



In the last column I highlighted the Public Accounts Committee's criticism of DCLoG's "woeful" handling of the £670 million Thames Gateway Development. The department's response was that these criticisms were "baffling" and "we simply do not recognise many of the suggestions in the report."

They must be even more baffled after the sudden exit of Thames Gateway Chief Executive Judith Armitt, which followed. And everything was going so well, too.

Water mistake



DCLoG's sidekicks at the Audit Commission have been marvelling at the roaring success in some areas at reducing outdoor fires. There have been some stunning local successes as proved by looking at the figures in 2006 and comparing them to 2007.

The Audit Commission visited Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service for evidence of the benefits of proactive initiatives in Norfolk. They were delighted and overwhelmed to

hear that a scheme aimed at reducing fires on Mousehold Heath had been a fantastic success. In 2006 over 100 incidents were attended. But in 2007 the total was in single figures.

The fact that 2006 was one of the hottest summers on record bringing large numbers of outdoor fires and 2007 was one of the wettest on record bringing massive flooding and generalised dampness would have played no role.

Hound of hell



The more classical scholars among you have responded to suggestions for a new nickname for the HR Department at Greater Manchester FRS which has three people heading it up. Top of the list is the new nick name of Cerberus the mythical three-headed dog of Hades, God of the Underworld.

The hellhound's role – Cerberus means "demon of the pit" – was making sure only the spirits went in, but nothing came out. Station Cat wonders if this is not totally unjustifiable especially after the award won by GMC's Human Resources Department.

It is a European Award and prestigious. **Older correspondents assure me GMC's clever playing of the joker clinched it for them.**

Crisis, what crisis?



Some think I am very unfair to the humble toilers of DCLoG and that I need my claws clipped. I apologise to them without reserve.

In their support I quote some of the ringing endorsements of the House of Commons Select Committee's review of the Department's annual report. The FBU's continued criticism of FireControl is all wrong and misleading, the project is a fantastic success.

As the Select Committee wrote: "The running theme of our report is that CLG needs to become better at co-ordinating complicated schemes involving a large number of stakeholders, to use the negotiating, brokering and persuasive skills to which the Secretary of State referred, **and to the absence of which we, the Capability Review, the NAO [National Audit Office] and the PAC [Public Accounts Committee] have**

drawn attention. The way the Department is structured, the range of its targets and the arms-length nature of its delivery mechanisms make that method of working the very essence of its performance.

"The fact that FiReControl is progressing towards completion is, of course, to be welcomed. However, the fact that the Department cites a project two years behind schedule and 50 per cent over its initial IT budget as an example of how it is improving its delivery mechanisms highlights the persistent challenge that CLG continues to face.

"It needs urgently to establish what the NAO calls 'a reputation amongst its partners for having enough strategic influence to solve problems within Whitehall that are creating obstacles to local success'."



The Select Committee has ringing endorsements throughout its report: "In 2005, we criticised the Department for overstating its achievements in its annual report. Simply omitting to mention failures such as the troubled implementation of HIPs is no less unacceptable." (Para 25)

The debacle over the introduction of Home Information Packs was put down to "poor preparation" and political panic with the department accepting it failed to take stakeholders with them. On Planet DCLoG, it just didn't happen.

Planet DCLoG reported it was on course to meet its equality target. What did the Select Committee make of that? "The fact that CLG wrongly reported itself as being on course to meet its Equality PSA target is not only unacceptable but a further indication of confusion about precisely what the Government wants to do in this area ..."



On Planet DCLoG they pride themselves in working together with stakeholders, including all of us in the fire service. The Select Committee wrote: "The Secretary of State recognises that those skills [negotiation, brokering and persuasion] are essential to the success of her Department and its ability to meet its public service agreements. **The Department's stakeholders remain to be convinced that they are sufficiently embedded in its staff and culture. We share their doubts.**"

25-year badges



Jim Gissing (r) Green Watch, Carlton Fire station, Notts, receives his 25-year badge from Steve Ainley, brigade secretary



Chris Wilkinson (r) Red Watch, Carlton Fire Station, Notts, receives his 25-year badge from Steve Ainley, brigade secretary



Mick Turner (r) Green Watch, Carlton fire station, Notts, receives his 25-year badge from Steve Ainley, Brigade Sec



Mick Newman (l) from Staveley, Derbyshire receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Dave Simonds



Mel Cook, Hornchurch Blue Watch Mess Manager, receives his 25-year badge from regional secretary Joe MacVeigh



Larry Lloyd (l) from Staveley, Derbyshire receives his 25-year badge from branch secretary Dave Simonds



Gary Rashbrook (l) from Richmond White Watch receives his 25-year badge from Laurie Brightman, London Region



Gary Jefferies (l) receives his 25-year badge from Walton on Thames rep Martin Cutler



Brian Jowett, Manager Green Watch W37 receives his 25-year badge from South Shore Blackpool branch secretary Dave Patterson

Please send photographic prints or digital picture files to: Firefighter, FBU, 68 Coombe Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 7AE or firefighter@fbu.org.uk (Please note that inkjet prints from digital pictures reproduce very poorly). Please include FULL DETAILS for every picture – full names of everyone who is in it; their station/brigade/watch etc; where they are in the picture (eg: left to right); their union posts/branch if relevant; and where and when it was taken.



Matt St.Hill (l) Stevenage, Herts, Blue Watch, receives his 25-year badge from Jim Bull, branch chair Stevenage/Hitchin

FBU REGIONAL OFFICES

→ **Region 1 Scotland**
52 St Enoch Square, Glasgow,
Scotland G1 4AA
0141 221 2309
o1rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 2 N. Ireland**
14 Bachelors Walk, Lisburn,
Co Antrim, BT28 1XJ
02892 664622
o2rs@fbu.org

→ **Region 3 Cleveland, Durham, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear**
1 Carlton Court, 5th Avenue, Team Valley,
Gateshead, NE11 0AZ
0191 487 4142
o3rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 4 Yorkshire and Humberside**
9 Marsh Street, Rothwell,
Leeds, LS26 0AG
0113 288 7000
o4rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 5 Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Isle of Man, Cumbria, Merseyside, Cheshire**
The Lighthouse, Lower Mersey St,
Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 2AL
0151 357 4400
o5rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 6 Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire**
Little Dennis Street South (above Dawsons)
Nottingham NG2 4EU
0115 947 2042
o6gen@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 7 West Midlands, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Hereford and Worcester, Salop**
195/7 Halesowen Rd, Old Hill,
West Midlands, B64 6HE
01384 413633
o7rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 8 Mid and West Wales, North Wales, South Wales**
4 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, Pencoed,
Bridgend, CF35 5UJ
01656 867910
o8rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 9 Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk**
28 Atlantic Square, Station Road,
Witham, Essex, CM8 2TL
01376 521521
o9rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 10 London**
John Horner Mews, Frome Street,
Islington, London, N1 8PB
020 7359 3638
london@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 11 Kent, Surrey, Sussex**
Fire Station, Coldharbour Road,
Northfleet, Kent, DA11 8NT
01474 320473
11rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 12 Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Isle of Wight**
The Fire Station, St Mary Street, High
Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP11 2HE
01494 513034
12rs@fbu.org.uk

→ **Region 13 Cornwall, Somerset, Devon, Avon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Dorset**
158 Muller Road, Horfield,
Bristol, BS7 9RE
0117 935 5132
13rs@fbu.org.uk

Change of address or next of kin

Advise your Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address and Head Office of changes to next of kin or nominations for benefits.

FBU FREEPHONE LEGAL ADVICE LINE

0808 100 6061

The line provides advice for **personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues.**

For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

T THOMPSONS SOLICITORS